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ABSTRACT

This report examines recent school choice developments in four broad areas: (1) the public's interest in public school choice; (2) state and federal government responses to this growing interest; (3) new research on existing programs permitting choice; and (4) prospects for expanding state efforts to promote public school choice. After providing definitions of terminology associated with school choice, the report summarizes state efforts to promote choice through local options (magnet and alternative schools) and metropolitan, limited, or comprehensive open entrollment plans. The third section describes major studies of several programs in Minnesota and Washington, the St. Louis and Wisconsin desegregation-choice plans, magnet schools in four large cities (Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, and New York), and choice plans in Masachusetts and East Harlem, New York. The studies show mixed results, but do not necessarily contradict one another. A consensus is emerging concerning certain desirable features of public school choice plans. Prospects for expanding the state role in developing such plans is encouraging. The choice concept is gaining support from the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association. The federal government has spent millions of dollars to help districts establish magnet schools and has supported research on the design and impact of choice plans. (44 references) (MLH)

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PROGRESS, PROBLEMS, AND PROSPECTS OF STATE EDUCATIONAL CHOICE PLANS

by Joe Nathan

JULY 1989

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PROGRESS, PROBLEMS, AND PROSPECTS OF STATE EDUCATIONAL CHOICE PLANS[1]

by Joe Nathan

This report describes the dramatic progress of a simple concept: that families should be allowed to choose among distinctive public schools that educators have developed. Over the past several years, this notion has been endorsed by the nation's governors and by a clear majority of the general public. This report examines recent developments in four broad areas:

- The public's interest in allowing families to select among public schools;
- The responses of States and the federal government to this growing interest;
- New research on existing programs that permit choice; and
- Prospects for expansion of State efforts to promote choice among public schools.

WHAT DOES THE PUBLIC THINK ABOUT CHOICE AMONG PUBLIC SCHOOLS?

It is easy to describe what the public thinks of allowing families to select among schools: there is widespread support for the idea. When a national Gallup poll in 1986 asked, "Do you wish you had the right to choose which public schools your children attend in this community?" 68 percent of the respondents answered yes, and 25 percent no. When another national Gallup poll in 1987 asked, "Do you think that parents in this community should or should not

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[1]Prepared for the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Budget and Evaluation, Planning and Evaluation Service. The opinions expressed in this paper are the author's own and do not represent or necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U.S. Department of Education.

have the right to choose which local schools their children attend?" 71 percent of respondents answered yes, and 20 percent said no (Gallup, 1986, 1987).

In 1985, Minnesota's Governor Rudy Perpich recommended in a speech that families should have the option to send their children to any public school, so long as the receiving district has room and the movement of students did not interfere with desegregation activities. Two months after Governor Perpich made his speech, a Statewide poll found 33 percent in favor and 60 percent opposed. Nevertheless, parts of the governor's proposal were adopted during each of the next four years, and as the State gained experience with public school choice, support grew. In 1987, a Statewide poll found that support for Perpich's proposal had increased to 56 percent (with 39 percent opposed). A 1988 Statewide poll found 63 percent now supported the idea, with 33 percent opposed. Thus, in four years, opinions had changed from about two-to-one against to two-to-one in favor of parental choice among public schools (Craig, 1987; Minnesota Business Partnership, 1988).

The national press, sensing public interest, discovered the issue. During the summer of 1988, the Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Boston Globe, and Philadelphia Inquirer all ran front-page stories on Minnesota's new public school program (Putka, 1988; Fiske, 1988; Cohen, 1988; Cassel, 1988). Newsweek and U.S. News and World Report published major stories on the subject during September 1988 (Leslie et al., 1988; Rachlin, 1988).

STATE AND FEDERAL INITIATIVES

Governors and legislators of both political parties have now noticed that more than 70 percent of Americans support choice among local schools. Edward Fiske of the New York

Times described the emerging national consensus about the value of expanding choice among public schools this way: "Conservatives see school choice as a way of injecting a dose of free enterprise into the educational system. Liberals see it as a way of giving the poor the same freedom the rich have" (Fiske, 1989).

In the past several years, 13 States developed new programs or increased financial support for existing public school choice programs. These States decided that increasing educational options expanded opportunity, used "controlled competition" to stimulate school improvement, and recognized that there is no one best school for all students or educators.

SUMMARY OF STATE ACTIONS PROMOTING PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE

State actions to promote choice among public schools are summarized below. The author gathered this information by telephoning State departments of education and governors' offices in December 1988. The information was updated in May 1989. No information is included here on proposals for action.

Definitions

Local Options

Local public school districts offer magnet schools or alternative programs from which families can select what they want for their children.

Open Enrollment

Limited: Certain students may attend public schools outside the district in which they live; the State pays the costs and no permission is required from the resident board of education.

Comprehensive: Students K-12 may attend public schools outside the district in which they live; the State pays the costs and no permission is required from the resident board of education.
Metropolitan: State permits one- or two-way movement between an urban district and surrounding suburban districts in order to promote desegregation/integration and higher quality education.

Postsecondary Options

Limited: Students may attend postsecondary programs with permission of the local district; State or local funds pay all or part of costs, or, as in Rhode Island, the State requires some formal action of the district.
Comprehensive: Students may attend postsecondary programs; State or local funds pay all tuition and fees; the local board may not decide which students may participate or which courses they may take.
Note: Many States permit students to take postsecondary courses and receive dual credit if the students pay for them. Most of these States permit districts to pay for postsecondary courses if the districts think the students are ready to take such courses. Neither of these options is considered in this report to be real encouragement from the State for more choice, so they are not listed here.

Program Development

The State provides funds explicitly to help school districts plan and to develop different kinds of full-day public school options.

Specialty School

A Statewide or regional magnet nine-month school that draws from several districts and is funded by the State.

Tax Deduction or Credit

Families are allowed to claim a deduction or credit on their State taxes for costs associated with education of their children.

Tuitioning

State funds to public and private, nonsectarian programs for certain students.

STATE SUMMARY

Alabama
Specialty School: The State established a Statewide High School for the Performing Arts, open to about 300 students in 1974.
Local Options: Magnet schools are available in some districts.

Alaska
Specialty School: A State residential boarding secondary school in Sitka is available to all students.
Local Options: Several districts have alternative programs.

Arizona
Limited Open Enrollment: Students may move across district lines taking State funds with them, but districts may establish covenants prohibiting movement between districts, and districts may charge nonresident families more than the State funds provide.
Limited Postsecondary Option: Students may take courses for high school graduation credit at community colleges if they pay for them; community colleges must accept these students and can receive State funding for them.
Local Options: Several districts have magnets or alternative schools.

Arkansas
Comprehensive Open Enrollment: In 1989, the State adopted a law permitting students ages 5 through 18 to move across district lines so long as the receiving district has room and the movement does not harm desegregation efforts.
Local Options: Several districts have alternative schools.

California
Program Development: The State helps support magnet schools for desegregation and has funded 25 schools within schools for talented students.
Tuitioning: The State supports private, nonsectarian education clinics for students who have not succeeded in public schools.
Limited Open Enrollment: The State allows elementary students to attend public schools in districts where their parents live or work, so long as the movement does not have a negative impact on desegregation activities.
Local Options: Many districts have alternative or magnet schools.

Colorado
Statewide Postsecondary Options: Juniors and seniors at public high schools may attend public postsecondary institutions; State funds pay for tuition.
Limited Open Enrollment: Students who have dropped out for a semester may attend a locally designed alternative public school in another district with State reimbursement; no permission from the resident district is required.
Local Options: Some districts have magnet and alternative schools.

Connecticut
Metropolitan Open Enrollment Program Development: The State funded several cooperative interdistrict plans to promote integration between cities and suburbs using urban magnet schools. The State also has funded a magnet program in Bridgeport, which began in the fall of 1988, to promote desegregation between suburb and city; so far no suburban students are participating.
Local Options: Magnet and alternative schools are available in some districts.

Delaware
No initiatives.

District of Columbia
Program Development: The District uses funds to establish magnet and alternative schools.
Local Options: The District offers a combination of magnet and alternative programs at the elementary and secondary level.

Florida
Limited Postsecondary Options: The State pays for students who maintain a certain grade point average to take courses that are not available in their high school at community colleges.
Local Options: Magnet and alternative schools are available in many districts.

Georgia
Local Options: Some districts have magnet and alternative schools.

Hawaii
Local Options: Some specialized programs within schools and some alternative and magnet schools are available.

Idaho
Local Options: Some districts offer alternatives.

Illinois
Specialty School: The State has established a Statewide math and science school.
Program Development: Some State funds are targeted to help support development of alternative or magnet schools.
Local Options: Some districts offer alternative and magnet schools.

Indiana
Local Options: Several districts have magnet schools.
Enabling legislation for a Statewide magnet secondary school has passed without funding and will be considered by the 1989 legislature.

Iowa
Comprehensive Open Enrollment: In 1989, the State adopted a law permitting students ages 5 through 18 to move across district lines so long as the receiving district has room and the movement does not harm desegregation efforts.
Limited Postsecondary Options: Public students may take one or two courses not available in their high school with the State paying tuition up to a limit of $200.
Tax Credit: Families may deduct from their State income tax a certain portion of the money they spend on their children's education.
Local Options: Some districts offer magnet and alternative schools.

Kansas
Limited Postsecondary Options: Seniors in high schools may take community college courses for high school credit; students must pay tuition and other charges. Both systems can collect reimbursement for these students.
Local Options: Some districts have magnet and alternative schools.

Kentucky
Local Options: Several districts have magnet and alternative schools.

Louisiana
Specialty School: The State has established a Statewide math and science high school.
Local Options: Several districts have magnet schools.

Maine
Limited Postsecondary Options: The State has allocated funds to pay for students to take courses at postsecondary institutions if the local district approves.

Maryland
Program Development: The State helped some districts develop magnet programs.
Local Options: Several districts offer magnet and alternative schools.

Massachusetts
Metropolitan Open Enrollment: Minority students in several cities may attend school in the suburbs; the State pays the tuition.
Program Development: The State provides funds to help individual districts establish choice programs.
Local Options: Many districts offer alternative and magnet schools.

Michigan
Specialty Schools: The State has allocated $1 million to help start approximately six regional magnet secondary science-math schools.
Local Options: Several districts offer magnet and alternative schools.

Minnesota
Limited Open Enrollment: Since 1983 up to 100 students have been allowed to attend public high schools outside their district which have State certified "Programs of Excellence" in particular academic areas.
Comprehensive Postsecondary Options: The State allows 11th and 12th grade students in public schools to enroll in postsecondary college, university, or vocational-technical schools. State funds allocated for their education follow them and pay all costs of tuition, books, and other fees.
Comprehensive Open Enrollment: Effective September 1989, students residing in districts enrolling more than 1,000 students may transfer across district lines to attend public schools outside their home districts so long as their transfer does not have a negative effect on desegregation and the receiving district has room. Students living in all districts gain this right in September 1990. Districts may not select among students on the basis of previous academic achievement, handicapped condition, or behavior.
Tax Deduction: The State allows deductions from the Minnesota State taxable income of up to $650 for elementary and $1,000 for secondary education expenses.
Local Options: Several districts have alternative and magnet schools.
Program Development: The State has authorized and provided funds for a Statewide performing arts magnet school.

Mississippi
Specialty School: The State has established a Statewide magnet math and science school.
Local Options: Several districts have magnet schools.

Missouri
Metropolitan Open Enrollment Program Development: The State has provided funds for the development of St. Louis magnet schools and transportation of students, and provides double funding of suburban and urban students whose movement between St. Louis and suburban districts promotes desegregation. The State has also paid for development of magnet schools in Kansas City.
Local Options: Some districts have alternative and magnet schools.

Montana
Local Options: Some districts have alternative schools.

Nebraska
A 1989 law allows movement for K-12 students in public schools across district lines so long as the transfer does not harm desegregation efforts and receiving districts have room. The law is being phased in beginning with the 1990-91 school year.
Local Options: Some districts have magnet and alternative schools.

Nevada
Local Options: Some districts have magnet and alternative schools.

New Hampshire
No initiatives.

New Jersey
Local Options: Some districts have magnet and alternative schools.

New Mexico
Local Options: Several districts have alternative schools.

New York
Program Development: The State provides funds to help establish urban magnet schools to promote integration.
Local Options: Many districts have magnet and alternative schools.

North Carolina
Specialty Schools: The State supports two State residential magnet schools.
Local Options: Some districts have established magnet schools.

North Dakota
No initiatives.

Ohio
Local Options: Several districts have magnet or alternative schools.
Comprehensive Open Enrollment: The State requires every school district to develop a plan for open enrollment and establishes a time schedule that by 1993 students may transfer across district lines to attend public schools so long as their transfer does not have a negative impact on desegregation and the receiving district has room.

Oklahoma
Program Development: The State provided $940,000 in 1988 to help districts establish alternative programs and schools for youngsters who are not succeeding in school.
Local Options: Some districts have magnet and alternative schools.

Oregon
Limited Postsecondary Options: A "Two-Plus-Two" program brings high schools and community colleges together to plan cooperative projects in which high school students sometimes take community college courses.

Tuitioning: Secondary students who have not succeeded in one public school are allowed to attend another public or private nonsectarian program; State funds follow the students.
Local Options: Several districts have magnet and alternative schools.

Pennsylvania
Local Options: Several districts offer magnet and alternative schools.

Rhode Island
Program Development: Legislation in 1988 authorized the development of "Governor's Schools," and an implementing task force is being assembled. These alternative schools will test restructuring concepts and new approaches to dealing with at-risk students.
Limited Postsecondary Option: Every district must develop a concurrent enrollment policy that permits high school students to attend postsecondary institutions. The State pays the fees; districts may retain the power to decide who participates in this program.
Local Options: Several districts have alternative or magnet schools.

South Carolina
Specialty School: In 1988 the State established a residential magnet school in math and science.
Local Options: Some districts have magnet and alternative schools.

South Dakota
Local Options: Several districts offer alternative programs.

Tennessee
Local Options: Several districts have alternative or magnet schools.

Texas
Local Options: Several districts have magnet or alternative schools.

Utah
Limited Postsecondary Option: Students may take postsecondary courses with some State reimbursement and some cost to the student.
Local Options: Some districts offer alternative schools.

Vermont
Tuitioning: Local boards of education may permit families to attend secondary public or private, nonsectarian schools approved by the State located outside the district.

Virginia
Specialty Schools: The State helped fund the development of five regional magnet schools.
Program Development: The State provided funds to individual districts to help develop magnet programs.
Local Options: Some districts offer magnet and alternative schools.

Washington
Limited Open Enrollment: The State allows students who have dropped out or are experiencing major difficulties to transfer across district lines.
Limited Postsecondary Option: The State has a small program under which high school students are permitted to take courses at the University of Washington; some dollars follow the students, and the families must pay some costs.
Tuitioning: The State funds private, nonsectarian educational clinics for students who have not succeeded in public schools.
Local Options: Many districts have magnet and alternative schools.

West Virginia
Local Options: A few districts offer alternative schools.

Wisconsin
Program Development: The State helped to pay for the development of magnet schools in Milwaukee.
Metropolitan Open Enrollment: The State "double-funds" the movement between Milwaukee and suburban districts which promotes desegregation, supporting both sending and receiving district; 780 went into the city and about 2,941 went out in 1986-87 (Cole, 1988).
Local Options: Several districts have alternative or magnet schools.

Wyoming
Local Options: Some districts have alternative schools.

As State governments were taking the actions just outlined, the federal government over the past five years has been providing millions of dollars to help urban districts establish magnet schools. In the 1988 reauthorization of the federal elementary and secondary school program, Congress increased funding for urban magnet schools that are part of desegregation programs.

In January 1989, President Reagan, President-elect Bush, and Secretary of Education Cavazos endorsed the idea of public school choice at the White House Workshop on Choice in Education. Bush called expansion of choice among public schools "a national imperative" and said his administration would "provide every feasible assistance--financial and otherwise--to

States and districts interested in further experiments with choice plans or other valuable reforms" (Bush, 1989).

RESEARCH ON PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE

Research on the various public school choice plans has shown that although choice is a powerful tool, not all plans are equally effective. The details of plans are critical, and failure to include certain features in a program can have unintended and unfortunate consequences. This section describes several key studies of various programs conducted over the past several years: several programs in Minnesota and Washington, the St. Louis and Wisconsin desegregation-choice plans, magnet schools in four large cities, and choice plans in Massachusetts and East Harlem, New York.

MINNESOTA'S STUDIES OF CHOICE OPTIONS

Between 1985 and 1988, the Minnesota legislature passed several laws expanding parental choice among public schools.

- The Postsecondary Options program allows 11th and 12th graders in the Minnesota public schools to attend colleges, universities, and vocational schools. Participation in this program increased from about 3,600 students in 1985-86 to about 5,700 in 1988-89 (about 5 percent of those eligible). First-year results showed that about 6 percent of the participants were re-enrolled school dropouts. The results documented that the high school students had done as well in postsecondary courses as the freshman class at most postsecondary institutions, or better. Furthermore, 90 percent of the parents said that their children had learned more than they would have if they had taken courses only at the local high school, and 95 percent of the students said that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the program.

A number of school districts have responded to this option by starting or expanding programs for students (Minnesota Department of Education, 1987). For example, without any new State funding or mandates, the number of advanced placement courses offered by Minnesota public high schools has quadrupled since the Postsecondary Options program began. According to University of Minnesota Twin Cities campus administrator Darryl Sedio, the number of schools working with the university to offer dual-credit courses in the high school has increased from 1 in 1985 to 24 in 1989. He believes the Postsecondary Options program helped stimulate this interest (Sedio, 1989).

Many of the families whose children have used Postsecondary Options have written to the Governor or legislators about the program. One parent described her 16 year old daughter as very bright, ranking in the bottom one-third of her high school class, and having plans to drop out and become a drummer in a rock band. Her mother then learned about the Postsecondary Option law and encouraged her to try it. In 1988 the young woman simultaneously graduated from high school and completed her first year of college with 45 credits and a high B average. Her mother wrote, "Stacy had the ability to succeed but without an alternative I am convinced she would not have graduated" (Montano, 1989, p. 177).

- High School Graduation Incentives (HSGI) and Area Learning Centers permit students between the ages of 12 and 21 who have not succeeded in one public school to attend another public school outside the district, so long as the receiving district has room and the student transfers do not interfere with desegregation. The Area Learning Centers legislation provides State funds to help 20 districts plan programs for these students and gives extra financial support to four of the programs judged to be of highest quality. Criteria used to determine which students are eligible to participate include low test scores or grades, chemical dependency, and excessive truancy or expulsion. According to the Minnesota Department of Education, about 1,500 students were enrolled in the program during the first year. Over 50 percent of HSGI students are re-enrolled dropouts. In its first six months, the program helped persuade more than 700 young people to return to school.

- The Limited Open Enrollment program was initiated in 1985, between 19-47 students participate each year. Most participants are from rural areas of the State. Most participants overwhelmingly endorse the program. Many parents have written letters saying that the program has produced dramatic improvement in their child's attitudes and in many cases achievements.

- In the Enrollment Options Program, parents of children between the ages of 5 and 18 may transfer their children to public schools outside the district in which they live if both districts approve. Beginning in 1989-90, school districts lose the power to prevent students from leaving unless the movement will interfere with desegregation plans. The first law was passed late in the 1987 legislative session, limited publicity was provided, and families had to apply during the summer of 1987 if they wanted to transfer. Approximately 20 percent of Minnesota's districts, 95 out of 435 districts, agreed to participate during the first year. In 1988-89, 153 districts enrolling 49 percent of Minnesota's students participated. In September 1987, 137 students from 94 families used the law to transfer, in 1988-89 about 440 students applied to use the law to transfer, and approximately 3,500 students applied to use the law to transfer for the 1989-90 school year. About 10 percent of the students who are using the open enrollment program in 1988-89 are members of minority groups, while about 8.5 percent of Minnesota's students are minorities -- Black, Hispanic, Native American, or Asian American.

  When the Department of Education asked parents who used the program in the 1987-88 school year about their satisfaction with the program, all the parents whose children are not graduating said they intend to use the program again next year. When asked to name their main reasons for participation in the Enrollment Options Program, 44 percent of families cited better curriculum and academics; 26 percent cited location (closer to day care, job, or home); 23 percent cited more options; 21 percent cited social benefits or alleviatfon of social problems; 16 percent cited better teaching; 14 percent cited more specialized classes; 7 percent cited parents' attendance there; and 7 percent cited a desire to complete high school or to maintain continuity after family moved (Zastrow, 1988).

Here are some sample explanations that parents gave for transferring:

"My child needed a more flexible program that allows her to use the community extensively to pursue her many interests. Our home district has very rigid requirements not suited to her needs and abilities."

"The resident district has no auto mech, welding, aviation, slow-learning English classes."

"To meet child's needs for more accelerated Art courses."

"The new district has a larger school with more learning disabled facilities and teachers."

"We have a business in the nonresident school district where both my husband and I work. It's much easier for transportation."

"My son has been attending the nonresident district for 4 years. He is Black, and this option was open to us. We were very displeased with the resident school system. An older son graduated from the resident high school. We are very satisfied with the nonresident schools. We see a vast difference in quality of education."

WASHINGTON'S EDUCATIONAL CLINICS PROGRAM

Since 1978, Washington State has provided State funds to help support "educational clinics" throughout the State to work with students who have dropped out of high school. All teachers in these programs must be licensed by the State. Most of the programs are run by nonprofit groups such as an antipoverty agency or an American Indian tribe. Several have been established by a for-profit group. The clinics are intended to provide short-term services to students, rather than to function as a substitute high school. Goals include helping students improve their skills and attitudes, develop their employment skills, and think about possible careers, and preparing them to take the GED (general educational development) test.

Washington State's Legislative Budget Committee has evaluated the clinics several times. In one evaluation the clinics were compared with public alternative schools: "Each type of approach appears to be valid and effective in its own way. Furthermore, each program produces outcomes which the Legislature has recognized as legitimate and desirable. On the basis of costs, outcomes and educational gains, the clinics make a good showing" (Washington State Legislative Budget Committee, 1983). Two years later, another evaluation found that the clinics had helped students: "While there is some dropoff, educational clinics appear to have a

lasting positive effect on a significant percentage of their students" (Washington State Legislative Budget Committee, 1985).

Several States, including California, Colorado, and Oregon, have adopted variations of the educational clinic theme similar to Washington State's programs, but no State has adopted precisely the same program.

ST. LOUIS'S DESEGREGATION PLAN

In an extraordinary series of articles published in January and February 1988, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch looked at what had happened during the five years of the St. Louis desegregation plan using public school choice as a key strategy to promote integration between the city and its suburbs. Twelve reporters and three photographers visited 118 schools in 17 school districts and conducted more than 1,600 interviews. The newspaper also commissioned a series of telephone polls of more than 2,500 teachers, parents, and students in St. Louis and the suburbs. The plan has several key components:

- Black students from the city are allowed to request a transfer to suburban districts. Suburban districts may reject students who have created discipline problems. Transportation is provided by bus or taxi from the city to the suburbs. The average cost of transporting a city student into the suburbs was $1,677 during the 1987-88 school year. A total of 11,655 black students transferred to suburban districts that year.

- White students from the suburbs are allowed to request a transfer into the city. Because relatively few suburban students transfer into the city--626 in 1987-88--the average cost of driving a county student into the city during the 1987-88 school year was $3,517 (Todd, 1988). Transportation is provided by bus or taxi from the suburbs into the city.

- Twenty-six magnet schools have been established in St. Louis to improve education for urban students and to attract white suburban students.

During the 1986-87 school year, the magnet elementary schools spent $5,590 per student, 42 percent more than was spent at neighborhood schools. Magnet high schools spent $7,602 per pupil, 27 percent more than the $5,403 spent on neighborhood high schools.

Despite the expenditure of more than $500 million in the past five years, almost two out of three black students in St. Louis attend schools that are at least 90 percent black. Many St. Louis black officials felt that the suburban schools were attracting some of the "best and brightest" black students. In 1986-87, the St. Louis city schools enrolled 46,636 students, of whom 35,280 were black and 11,356 were white.

WISCONSIN'S DESEGREGATION-CHOICE PLAN

Wisconsin established a program in 1976 to encourage metropolitan school integration by enabling Milwaukee public school students to attend suburban public schools, and suburban students to attend city schools. The program, called Chapter 220, pays both suburban and urban districts for each student who moves, in effect "double-funding" students who transfer. Moreover, suburban districts receive a 20 percent increase in basic aid if the number of minority transfer students they accept equals or exceeds 5 percent of their overall enrollment. Transportation is provided to all participating students.

A recent study strongly questioned the way this program operates for the following reasons:

- The State is providing an enormous amount of financial aid to suburban districts--it averaged $2,057 per pupil during 1986-87. For the same period, Milwaukee and participating suburban districts received an average of $8,737 for each transfer student. "Suburban districts, many with substantial ability to pay, receive State aid payments which exceed actual costs of educating Chapter 220 students," the study notes (Mitchell, 1988). The study's author recommended eliminating the "bonus" payments to suburban districts.

- The cost of transportation was excessive. The study found that although the Statewide average transportation cost per pupil in 1986-87 was $256, this program's average transportation cost per pupil was $2,100.

- The costs are increasing faster than the number of students participating. "Between 1977 and 1982, participation increased 244% and costs rose 406%. Between 1982 and 1987, participation increased 226% and costs rose 328%" (Cole, 1988).

FOUR-CITY MAGNET SCHOOL STUDY

Many large cities have created a few magnet schools to promote integration, with most schools continuing to serve a certain geographical area. Districts often have allowed magnet schools much more flexibility, given them more financial resources, and allowed them to select faculty and students. Two Chicago-based researchers recently studied the impact of magnet high schools in four cities: Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, and New York.

Boston was the only one of the four cities that did not give extra resources and freedom to its magnet high schools. Researchers found a "six tier" system in the other cities, made up of nonselective low-income schools, nonselective low- to moderate-income schools, nonselective moderate income schools, selective vocational schools, selective magnet schools, and selective exam schools. The researchers concluded that "many schools in the upper tiers operate as separate, virtually private schools, while those in the bottom tier, catering almost exclusively to low-income students, provide essentially custodial care" (Moore and Davenport, 1988, p. 3).

In these four cities, it was possible to predict which kinds of students would attend each kind of school. Low-income, black, Hispanic, special education students, and students with attendance problems were heavily concentrated in low-income and low- to moderate-income

nonselective schools. These researchers were not critical of all choice plans, but urged changes in school district procedures so that neighborhood schools had more opportunity to compete with other schools. "Study results call into fundamental question the naive view that loosely structured choice systems will yield improved schools for all students through 'competition'" (Moore and Davenport, 1988, p. 10).

The report concludes with a series of recommendations for key features of choice plans to be included if the plans are to benefit the overall student body, rather than just a few. These recommendations include suggestions such as revamping admission policies to increase the representativeness of selective school enrollments; developing options to meet the needs of a representative cross section of a school system's students; distributing resources more equitably; and granting nonselective schools prerogatives regarding staff selection, staff training, upgrading of facilities, and discretionary funding, currently available to only selective schools.

MASSACHUSETTS'S CHOICE PLANS

During the past seven years, the Massachusetts legislature has allocated more than $40 million to promote public school choice plans. The State has helped school districts and educators develop distinctive schools from which parents may choose. Funds allocated by the State's Office of Educational Equity have supported planning, building remodeling, and parent information activities.

For example, Cambridge, Massachusetts, five years ago, eliminated all neighborhood elementary schools (K-8). The State helped educators plan various programs and then helped

support a parent information center. This "controlled choice" plan allowed parents to select among various schools so long as racial-balance guidelines were followed.

State and local officials are delighted with the results of the plan. Over the past five years, average student achievement has increased every year, and the gap in achievement between black and white students has decreased. A State official concluded, "The biggest impact is on school climate....The policy appears to be stimulating positive educational environments, and it clearly reinforces the theory that socio-economic mixing enhances school achievement" (Snider, 1988, p. 15).

EAST HARLEM'S CHOICE PROGRAM

It is a long way from Cambridge, Massachusetts, to East Harlem, New York, in mind set, if not in miles. While Cambridge is racially and economically diverse, East Harlem is predominantly minority and one of the lowest income areas in the country. Nevertheless, as John Merrow of the Public Broadcasting System's "McNeil/Lehrer Report," has pointed out, "East Harlem is educationally rich" (Merrow, 1989).

Over the past 10 years, the district has developed a system of choice among its public junior high and middle-school programs. Each program is available on the basis of choice, replacing the neighborhood programs, and teachers are allowed to create programs which match their vision of the most effective education possible. Popular programs have been replicated, while those that are not successful have been closed. Alternatives also are available at the elementary school level.

East Harlem has a waiting list of teachers, which is not surprising since administrators have given teachers the chance to carry out their dreams. As one teacher, a 16 year veteran of New York City schools explained, "People are here because they want to be. And that's shown by the kind of attendance we have. There's a camaraderie, because this place doesn't have to exist...If it didn't meet needs, it would fold...My idea of education at its best is that people who work in it would have the power to do what they thought was good, and that they would feel happy about themselves when they left at the end of the day" (Merrow, 1989).

To help parents and students make informed decisions about schools, materials are printed in English and Spanish. Further, each sixth grade student takes a decision-making unit, which focuses on the options available for junior high school and assists students in selecting the schools most appropriate for them.

Improvements in East Harlem are clear and demonstrable. When the district started this program, its students ranked last among the 32 community districts in New York City, and about 15 percent of the students read at or above grade level. Today, its students rank, depending on the test, 15th or 16th, and about 65 percent of the students read at or above grade level. More parent involvement, less school vandalism, better student and educator attendance, and higher morale among educators are also evident. Journalists and district administrators report a major reason for these improvements is the choice plan (Fliegel, 1989, Merrow, 1989, Fiske, 1988).

The district also, about five years ago, assumed responsibility for operating a high school in its community; prior to that time East Harlem offered programs for grades K through 8 only. District teachers and administrators began operating the school, which at that time had a

graduation rate of 7 percent, using the principles developed by Ted Sizer and the Coalition of Essential Schools. The high school is open to anyone who wishes to attend, and in its first two years, more than 90 percent of its students graduated (Fliegel, 1989).

HOFSTRA UNIVERSITY STUDY

Hofstra University Professor Mary Anne Raywid recently completed a review of more than 100 studies on various public school choice plans, "The Mounting Case for Schools of Choice" (Raywid, 1989). Raywid concludes that when families have the opportunity to select among various public schools, students achieve more and like school and themselves better, parents have better attitudes toward school, and educators feel more like professionals. Raywid strongly supports more choice among public schools and vigorously opposes providing additional tax funds to private and parochial schools.

A SUMMARY OF THIS RESEARCH

The studies just cited, which were conducted across the country, do not necessarily contradict one another. A consensus is emerging about certain key features of public school choice plans. Although plans differ, most effective plans have the following common elements:

- A clear statement of the goals and objectives for all schools and their students;
- Information and counseling to help parents select among various programs for their children;
- Student assignment and transfer policies that do not discriminate against students on the basis of past achievement or behavior;

- o Nondiscriminatory admission policies that draw from a wide spectrum of students, not "first come-first served" admission procedures;
- o Encouragement and assistance for most schools within a given geographical area to develop distinctive features, rather than simply a concentration of resources on a few schools;
- o Opportunities for educators in the schools themselves to help create programs;
- o Available transportation within a reasonable area for all students, with a priority given to those coming from low-income and non-English-speaking families;
- o A requirement that dollars should follow students (i.e., sending and receiving institutions should not both receive funding);
- o Procedures that promote more desegregation and integration among students; and
- o Provisions for continuing oversight and modification.

The strongest, most effective plans will include these features and will produce expanded opportunity and increased achievement for all students in the area served by a choice plan, not just for a fortunate few.

PROSPECTS FOR EXPANSION OF THE STATE ROLE IN PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE

In a democracy, it is not enough to have popular support for an idea--it must have advocates. New, often unusual coalitions are promoting public school choice throughout the country.

In Minnesota, for example, the governor has been joined by the League of Women Voters, Minnesota PTA, Elementary and Secondary School Principals, and the Minnesota Business Partnership (MBP). MBP comprises the chief executive officers of the 75 largest companies in

the State (3M, Honeywell, Pillsbury, etc.). Hundreds of individual educators supported the legislation against the opposition of powerful education groups such as the Minnesota Education Association, Minnesota Federation of Teachers, Minnesota School Boards Association, and Minnesota Association of School Administrators, all of whom used their influence and resources trying to defeat it. Two studies of the Minnesota experience appeared in 1987 (King and Roberts, 1987; Mazzoni, 1987). Each agrees that the development of coalitions, including educators and people outside the profession, was central to the adoption of legislation in Minnesota.

Similar coalitions are emerging in Colorado and California. In Colorado, liberal and conservative State legislators agreed to a postsecondary options plan recommended by a liberal State board of education member who spent years opposing voucher plans (funding private and parochial schools) and a conservative think-tank, the Independence Institute. A K-12 open-enrollment bill, similar to Minnesota's law, also was introduced in 1988 but defeated. Officials of various groups are meeting to discuss how they can work together on a bill.

In California, the Business Roundtable recently adopted a series of reform recommendations that would allow 11th and 12th graders to choose among various secondary and postsecondary schools, as well as promote more choice within individual school districts (BW Associates, 1988). The California Business Roundtable is beginning to work with public alternative school educators to win support for this program. For the past several years, California public alternative school teachers and administrators have been trying to win support for legislation to authorize public school educators to establish a school if parents of at least 30 students said they wanted their children to attend the program. Any program established under

this legislation would have to meet all State standards. A variety of California reform reports issued over the past several years recommend expansion of choice among public schools.

In 1989, Governor Clinton of Arkansas, Governor Branstad of Iowa, Governor Orr of Nebraska, and Governor Gardner of Washington recommended, and their legislators adopted, programs of public school choice. In Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, and Wisconsin, the governors have suggested that their legislators take action in 1989 to expand the public school options available to families. For example, the Massachusetts governor has asked the Department of Education to develop an enrollment options program similar to Minnesota's. In Arizona, Connecticut, Michigan, and Ohio business leaders, educators, and parents are encouraging their legislators to adopt some form of expanded public school choice. Consultant Paul Berman, who wrote reports for businesses in California and Minnesota which included choice recommendations, recently recommended various reforms, including more public school choice, in Hawaii.

These recommendations have not been ignored. Al Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, suggested in April 1988 that public school teachers be allowed to create distinctive programs from which families could choose (Shanker, 1988). The Citizens League, based in Minneapolis-St. Paul, used that recommendation as the basis for its recommendations on dealing with desegregation in a report issued in December 1988 (Citizens League, 1988). The lobbyist for the Minnesota Education Association, acknowledging that his organization initially opposed Governor Perpich's open-enrollment proposals, recently said, "We are starting to see it as teacher empowerment" (Bencivenga, 1988). Further, the Minnesota Association of School Administrators, which had lobbied against Governor Perpich's proposals,

recently published a brochure for parents entitled "How to Pick Your Child's School" (Minnesota Association of School Administrators, 1989).

The National Education Association (NEA), headed by Mary Futrell, has participated in various public school choice plans throughout the country, and Mary Futrell recommended to the nation's governors a series of features that should be a part of any choice plan. These features were included in the 1986 report Time for Results (National Governors' Association, 1986). While a recent NEA staff discussion paper noted that the association opposes programs providing funds to private and parochial schools, it goes on to say that "the climate has changed. The definition of the term choice has been tempered with the advent of recent proposals that move away from vouchers and funding of private schools and toward choice within the public schools. This calls for fresh consideration of the choice concept, particularly in terms of how implementation of recent choice proposals will effect the structure of schools, the role of teachers and teacher organizations and outcomes for students" (NEA, 1989, p. 1).

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S ROLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHOICE PLANS

The federal government has played an important role in the development of choice plans at the State and local levels.

- The federal government has spent millions of dollars to help districts establish magnet schools. This money has been spent with mixed results. Some of the best local choice plans in the country, such as that in East Harlem, were established with federal assistance and so were some of the magnet school systems most frequently criticized, such as those in Chicago. As already noted, the details of choice plans are critical. In East Harlem, all junior high schools offer alternative programs, receiving approximately equal dollars per pupil and admitting a cross section of students who apply. In response to parents' requests in East Harlem,

some of the most popular schools have been replicated within the district. Chicago, in contrast, has relatively few magnet schools, there are long waiting lists at the most popular schools, and the differences in funding for magnet and neighborhood schools are enormous. Moreover, Chicago magnet schools are allowed to pick and choose among students and educators. Not surprisingly, there is an enormous gap between the quality of education provided at magnet schools and that provided at neighborhood schools.

Does this mean that the federal government should not support the development of magnet schools? Not at all. However, the federal government should pay more attention to the details of choice plans, and promote the East Harlem and Cambridge model rather than the Chicago plan. In written testimony, the author of this report recently suggested to a Congressional committee that the federal government use magnet school funds to encourage most or all schools within an urban area to be magnets, rather than creating a few "super schools." The federal government also might require that school districts receiving magnet school funds establish parent information centers with aggressive outreach programs, and that schools developed with federal funds not be allowed to select among students on the basis of previous achievement or behavior (Nathan, 1989b).

- The federal government has supported research about the design and impact of choice plans. Portions of the studies carried out by Raywid and Moore and Davenport, cited earlier, were done with federal assistance. Moreover, the federally funded study of Minnesota's Postsecondary Options program helped legislators understand the overall effects of the program. But important research questions about choice plans remain to be answered, and federal support to find answers could be helpful. For example, the federal government might ask researchers to look at how technology could be used to help parents make more informed choices among schools, or what effects different approaches to racial balance guidelines might have for choice systems, or what standards States should require that all schools meet.

- The federal government could encourage the attention of the nation on this issue. Publicizing the value of well-designed choice plans and the problems of poorly designed programs via conferences, publications, and

speeches would help more people understand what is happening and assist State and local decisionmaking.

CONCLUSIONS

In a book published one month after A Nation at Risk appeared in 1983, the author of this report recommended expanded options among public schools as a key part of school reform (Nathan, 1983), but there was no substantial State level interest in the idea among policymakers or the media until the last several years of this decade. Interest has been heightened by such events as the endorsement of the concept by the National Governors' Association, the encouraging experiences in East Harlem, Cambridge and Minnesota, and the attention to the ideas of Minnesota Governor Rudy Perpich, who discussed public school choice in his role as chair of Education Commission of the States during 1988-89.

Many States and school districts are now looking closely at the research and details of public school choice programs. Scholars have determined that school choice is a powerful reform tool. Although no one best approach exists for all States, recognition appears to be growing that all choice programs should include certain critical elements such as parent information, nondiscriminatory admission policies, and opportunity for educators to create distinctive programs. Failure to include these elements can increase rather than decrease the gaps in achievement and opportunity between affluent and low-income young people.

Today, most people support the idea of more choice among public schools. In response to new coalitions of private and public sector advocates, more than 20 States have taken steps to implement some choice in their public school systems. Allowing families and educators to select among various public schools can have a rapid, dramatic, positive effect. As educators,

parents, and, most important, students, have testified, being allowed to select among public schools has changed lives.

At the White House Workshop on Choice in Education in January 1989, 18-year-old Chris Wilcox described how Minnesota's choice programs had affected his life, enabling him to attend an alternative public school and a local community college. Without the choice programs, he said, "I probably would not graduate....Choice not only gave me a chance to personalize my education, but it also gave me the confidence that I can make something of myself and control my destiny" (Nathan, 1989a, p. 222).

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